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ABSTRACT

This review of the literature notes some of the attributes of successful teachers of reading. Some of the attributes are the ability to motivate students, the ability to individualize instruction, the promotion of positive self-concepts in students, and the conveyance of positive expectations for students. A note of caution in the conclusion is that the teacher is only one of many factors in the making of a successful reader. (MKM)

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ATTRIBUTES OF THE SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS OF READING

Presented to

Dr. Mauch

Dr. DeRemer

The Graduate School

University of Pittsburgh

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Course

Educational Administration 390

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by

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INTRODUCTION

In trying to identify the components that differentiate the successful teacher of reading and the successful teacher of anything proved to be quite difficult as teaching, or at least successful teaching, has certain tangible ingredients that are intertwined.

The purpose of this study is to identify and separate these components, if possible, and make them more easily recognized for categorization purposes. If the attributes of the successful teachers of reading can be isolated, the success of any reading program can be greatly enhanced.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The very first concept that successful reading teachers learn is that the human motivation is complex.[1] Each student reacts to various experiences, and each new one is affected by the accumu-

[1]Brown, George Isaac. Human Teaching for Human Learning. Viking Press, New York, 1971.

lation of previous events. The teacher who seeks to interpret a student's actions may often be misled or puzzled because no problem has plagued educators and psychologists in recent years more than the process by which human beings learn to read. Recognition that learning to read is one of the basic operations of the human has stimulated educators and psychologists to initiate extensive and detailed examinations of the reading process.

The catalyst in unlocking the keys to reading may very well be the teacher of reading.[2] If this concept is true, then ways of identifying the attributes of the Successful Teachers of Reading could possibly expedite the reading process.

Everything for which the school stands is threatened by an unhealthy classroom atmosphere. How much is learned when the classroom discipline is either too rigid or too lax? If a teacher consistently frightens, intimidates, and bullies students, little learning occurs. Creativity and inquiry are stifled. Students are unwilling to risk ridicule and abuse. Unfortunately, in too many classrooms, it is the teacher who is abused and bullied; and, again, little learning results. The classroom environment contains the ingredients which either encourage or discourage learning.

The successful reading teacher has goals in mind which are shared by many of his pupils.[3] He quickly recognizes that the teacher in the automotive shop has no problem of motivation, if

[2]Dechant, Emerald V. Improving the Teaching of Reading. Prentice-Hall, 2nd edition, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970.

[3]Hyman, Ronald T. Contemporary Thoughts on Teaching. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970.

he observes success at this level. He offers something that the students want. The same boys may be bored and hostile when the Social Studies teacher discusses the causes of World War I because no relationship has been established between the war and these boys' lives.

Successful teachers of reading are quick to substitute praise for sarcasm; prizes for ridicule; scholarships for demerits; teacher approval for detention; sending for parents for parental approval; extra credit for extra work for standing in the corner. The list could go on and on with increasing importance.

The successful teacher of reading readily learns the importance of individual difference. Individual differences are present in all behavior to confound our generalizations.[4] Teachers who deal with specifics feel more comfortable when they are able to gather a number of specifics to make a generalization.

The successful teacher of reading learns early that in most cases, teachers know more than their students, but are almost certain to have some students who have higher levels of intelligence than the teacher. Such students are only a problem when the teacher enters into a competition to demonstrate intelligence. The resultant antagonisms destroy the learning situation. The successful teacher will find pleasure in the superior intellect of a student, profess his superior knowledge, and invite competition to know more than he does.

[4]Greensberg, Herbert M. Teaching with Feeling, Compassion, and Self-Awareness in the Classroom Today. MacMillan, New York, 1969.

The successful reading teacher knows that an important distinction needs to be made between maintaining control and dominating.[5] Every person in control dominates, but he may do so for the common good, or merely because he enjoys wielding power. This is the difference between being dominant and domineering. The teacher who is domineering arouses retaliatory feelings--"Just wait until I'm in charge". When the teacher in control dominates for the benefit of all, a cooperative attitude is developed. There is little doubt that cooperation between teacher and students sets the stage for learning.

The successful teacher of reading realizes the importance of the development of the ability to remember, that it is essential to human welfare. Even the least academic student relies on memory to find his way home from school and to meet the ordinary demands of the day. Many teachers may not recognize that skill in recall and recognition is the result of ability to reproduce content. The creative urge pushes people to ignore the shackles of reproduction, but productive efforts are still firmly anchored to that ability.

The successful teacher is able to accept the fact that stress is important in the teaching of reading.[6] He knows that in a situation where a boat capsizes, it will appear obvious that non-swimmers are more likely to be distressed by this event than

[5]Dolch, Edward William. Psychology and Teaching of Reading. Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1970.

[6]Gates, Arthur Irving. Teaching of Reading. American Education Research Association, 1962.

persons who can swim. To the extent a person is an excellent swimmer, or if he has come prepared with a life jacket, the discomfort he will experience in the same situation will probably be less. Learning to swim, just as learning to read, may be regarded as a socially learned ability, and a life jacket or a helping hand may be regarded as a culturally required instrument. If a person cannot utilize these means or substitute for them such as holding on to a boat, or holding on to a teacher--his position is precarious. Thus, whether a student will experience stress in a situation is dependent on the means he can manipulate his surroundings in any given situation.

The prevention of negative self-concept is a vital first step in successful teaching.[7] There seems to be a general agreement that the successful teacher needs to have positive and realistic attitudes about himself and his abilities before he is able to reach out to like and respect others. Those who accept themselves tend to be more accepting of others and perceive others as more accepting. The successful teacher needs to view himself with respect, liking, and acceptance. When teachers have essentially favorable attitudes toward themselves, they are in a much better position to build positive and realistic self-concepts in their students.

It is difficult to overestimate the need for the successful teacher to be sensitive to the attitudes he expresses toward

[7]Uelman, Roy Roland. "The Prognostic Value of Certain Factors Related to Teaching Success"; thesis, University of Michigan, 1938.

students. Even though teachers may have the best intentions, they sometimes project distorted images of themselves. What a person believes can be hidden by negative habits picked up long ago. Therefore, the successful teachers of reading keep asking themselves, "Am I projecting an image that tells the student that I am here to build, rather than destroy, him as a person?" "Do I let the student know that I am aware of and interested in him as a unique person?" "Do I convey my expectations and confidence that this student can accomplish work, can learn, and is competent?" "Do I provide well defined standards of values, demands for competence, and guidance toward solutions to problems?" "When working with parents, do I enhance the academic expectation and evaluation which they hold of their children's ability?" "By my behavior, do I serve as a model of authenticity for the student?" "Do I take every opportunity to establish a high degree of private or semi-private communication with my students?"

The teaching of reading has been influenced by two movements that seem at first to be at odds with each other. About ten years ago, teachers were told that to teach well, they must know the structure of English, its phonology, morphology, and syntax. Very soon thereafter, they were told to pay more attention to how and why children learn to use and understand language and to remember that how children feel is more important than what they know.

Both linguistics and psychology play influential roles in the successful teaching of reading in schools.

The implications of psycholinguistic studies often seem to

run counter to what teachers have been taught about reading instruction. Having learned that pupils fail in reading when pushed beyond their "mastery level", teachers are confused by advice suggesting that children should be allowed to get what they can out of books that may be "above their level".

The U. S. Office of Education conducted and publicized a spate of first grade reading, some of which continued into second and third grades.[8] These studies reflected the pitting of one reading approach against another. Altogether, five different basal series, three phonics programs, two linguistic programs, and two i/t/a programs were tried out in classrooms across the country. The results were evaluated with the same tests. Among classes using the same methods, sharper differences showed up in end-of-the-year testing than appeared between classes using the different methods under comparison. This surprising result led many to infer that teachers, not methods, were responsible for the difference between success and failure in the teaching of reading.

CONCLUSION

In attempting to identify the attributes of the successful

[8]Bond, Guy L. "Coordinating Center for First-Grade Reading Instruction Programs", final report, USOE Project No. X-001, Mineapolis; University of Minnesota, 1967.

teachers of reading, if research says anything, it is, "Don't go overboard"; success depends on the integration of many, many factors, of which the teacher is only one. The student, the family, the community, the technique, etc., are all important to accomplish the goal of becoming a successful reader.

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